

THE OPTIMIST

Drawing by C. D. Williams

By ROY NORTON



"Nobody's ever whipped, or killed, or flat busted, or down and out, until he says so himself and believes it!"

Being the first of a series of stories, founded on truth, of those who refused to surrender.

The widely reputed courage and optimism of Ramori the Great were other than unearned laurels, he had need of them now; for it was agreed by all save Ramori himself that his case was hopeless. The London specialist, summoned as soon as the subscription list had totaled sufficiently to retain his distinguished services, passed the verdict to Mademoiselle Yvette, *première danseuse*, and the "Three Peerless Parlows," acrobats, who anxiously awaited him in the hallway of the dingy, fifth-rate lodging house.

"Not a chance in the world for his recovery," said the great diagnostician concisely, as he began drawing on his gloves.

The Peerless Parlows, stockily built men whose clothes appeared to fit them badly and failed to conceal overbulging muscles, stuck their hands into their pockets and stared hopelessly at the floor; but Mademoiselle Yvette declined to accept the ultimatum without question. Cheap and tawdry as was her apparel, blondined as was her hair, there was still something in her frank American eyes that made the great specialist suddenly doff his hat, as if he had abruptly discovered himself in the presence of a real woman.

"But, Doc," she insisted, looking up at him, "ain't nerve goin' to count at all? He's got the nerve of the devil, Ted Williams has, and—well, you see he's got a hunch that he won't croak, and also that if he does he's a goin' to do it at home."

"Home?"

"Yes, on the other side; America, you know. That's where we all come from. Oh, maybe you ain't wise! Ramori's his stage name. We're all of us artists. And Ted's got his mind set on it that—"

"Impossible!" declared the specialist. "Listen!"

He waved his hand indefinitely toward the interior of the dark, badly cleaned hallway, and through the warped door of the room he had just visited came the hollow, racking cough of a man in distress. The physician lifted his hands and dropped them eloquently.

"If they permitted him to take passage on a ship, which you may be sure they wouldn't, it is very doubtful, in my opinion, whether he would last to see land again. His time is too short. No, I'm sorry, but it is hopeless—quite hopeless!"

He replaced the shining silk hat on his head, took another step that brought him to a view of the squalid street where a crowd of dirty, unkempt children hovered about an impressive automobile, and beckoned to the chauffeur. The latter touched a switch, and a motor began to bark impatiently, as if annoyed by wasted time.

"But can't you do him any good?" desperately insisted the dancer, detaining the renowned physician. "We had to take up a collection among the profesh to get you here; but—they say you're great. Surely you can do somethin'! We can dig up more money, you know, Doc. We're all workin' regular, and on the bills all right. Can't you—"

"My dear Miss—"

"Kelly," assisted Mademoiselle Yvette.

"Miss Kelly, I can do nothing. You would merely waste your money. I have left a prescription with him. That is the best and all that I or any other man can do. It is intended solely to make it easier for your friend. I doubt if he will last a week. I am very sorry. Goodby."

THEY stood with an air of helplessness and watched until the shining car had droned its way out of sight, as if daintily hurrying to get away from such an unsavory neighborhood, and then faced one another.

"What's doctors for, anyhow, if they can't cure a sick feller?" growled Bill, the largest of the Parlows.

"To get the money," cynically responded one of the pseudo-brothers. "He got a hundred bucks of hard-earned dough, and ain't done nothin' but say that poor old Ted's got to pass on. Humph!"

"Well," said the third, who had been staring out into the street with his hat pulled down over his eyes as if already watching a funeral, "w'at are we goin' to do about it? Shall we tip the old sport off and hand it to him straight?"

They had come to no decision in this latter regard

when they returned to the room, outside whose door they stood and stared at one another with unusual gravity in their eyes until called upon to enter by a queer, croaking voice from within. They obeyed, and were peculiarly awkward now that they confronted the man who was doomed; but as for him, white, emaciated, rough-haired, he grinned at them with the utmost cheerfulness and directed his bright eyes from one to the other.

"Oh, it's that way, eh?" he croaked. "The medical guy gave me a pass-out check that ain't got no come-back on it! Just like leavin' the big show. No return checks issued. He! He! He!"

He leaned his head back on his pillow and laughed until a choking spell compelled him to desist, while his audience sat in highly embarrassed silence. For a half-minute he rested, with his eyes closed, and then opened them. His visitors were shocked by the twinkle in them. It seemed undue levity in a dying man, a jest with Providence.

"Told you I was goin' to kick off, eh? And you're afraid of hurtin' my feelin's by handin' out the news! That's a scream. Do you know why? Because I ain't dead yet, and ain't a goin' to die either, so long as there's any breath left in me. Can't tell. Maybe I won't ever die till I get good and ready."

The speech was long and exhausted him for another minute, during which interval his hearers tried to think of something cheerful to say, and Mary Kelly, the dancer, pretended to scold at the way the room was kept, and fussed to and fro on useless tasks.

"Nobody's ever whipped, or killed, or flat busted, or down and out, until he says so himself and believes it!" declared Williams, lifting himself on an elbow and staring at his visitors. "Ask me. I know!"

He appeared to challenge them; but no one answered: the politeness due a sick man silenced their tongues.

"I was dragged up on a farm out on the Colorado border line," explained the invalid, as if apologizing for courage in adversity. "Sometimes it didn't rain, and the crops went to the devil. Did we run? Not so's you could notice it! Just said, 'Wait till next year.' Sometimes we didn't have much to eat. No pork—no beef. Did we starve? Not just! We lived on parched

corn, and got hog-fat on it too. A cyclone cleaned us out of every stick of timber, every spear of grain, everything but the ground and the dugout that saved us. Did we quit? Nope. Just built another house and planted another crop."

He stopped for breath, while the acrobats listened patiently.

"That's what I got to do—build another house," he mumbled. "And my crop of stage stuff's no good any more. Rope acts is done for. I'm goin' back to the farms—out where there's clean air—to get well again. Want to start right away. Ain't nothin' in puttin' off what has to be done."

"But the doctor," began Bill Parlow soothingly, and was interrupted by the patient, who said:

"The doctor be hanged! I'm a goin'."

"Sure you are, Teddy," agreed Mademoiselle, scowling at the acrobats, and with her back to the sick man, gesticulating an appeal to humor him. "Sure you are; but you'll have to rest and get strong before you do the stunt."

IN the cracked mirror over the combination washstand and dresser he saw it all, smiled satirically, and relapsed into silence. They left him alone with his problem; for theirs was a time schedule that knew neither excuses nor delays, and when the door closed after them he lay for a long time blinking up at the stucco ornament above the antiquated gas chandelier from which all burners save one had been removed by the thrifty landlady.

It was not a pleasant situation to review. First, he had not a penny, his savings having been dissipated through months of idleness and doctors' fees. Next, he was in a foreign land, separated by an ocean from his own soil, and a further long journey to make once he landed there. Probably too he owed the landlady. He devoted some thought to this as being the most urgent obstacle, and concluded that this obligation was impossible; otherwise, dying though he might be, she would have him thrown into the street. Then there were steamer fares, which would be expensive, and—what was that he overheard them saying out there in the hall? Oh, yes—he remembered now. The steamers would probably not accept a passenger who was likely to die before the voyage was completed, not even if he had the money; and he frowned when he recalled that he had parted with clothing, piece by piece, and sold his pocket knife for twopence some days before he had admitted to a professional friend that he was flat broke. He muttered angrily when it dawned on him that for sometime he must have been living on the charity of those who had not forgotten that in prosperous days no man in rough luck had ever applied to him in vain.

DID you want me, Sir?" a voice interrupted his meditations, and the frowzy landlady poked her head, then her body, through the door.

"No," he said, wondering at this unusual attention.

"Ow! Thought I heard you speak," she said, closing the door behind her and, with arms akimbo, staring at him.

He surmised she would have something further to say and watched her, immovable, expectantly.

"You're very ill," she said, and then, under the steadiness of his eyes, looked at the floor as if disinclined to meet them till she had finished her speech. "And seeing as how you're so ill, maybe you ought to be taken to a 'orspital."

"What for?" he demanded bluntly.

"Well, you see I was listening to what they was saying of out in the 'all, Sir, and—and—"

"Don't want me to die here, eh?" he interrupted, with a grin. "Afraid it might hurt the reputation of your dump, I reckon. Think some folks might think it was you and the house between you that killed me, eh?"

Her lips shut firmly, and he noted the danger signals, and rallied his wits to meet this first setback to all his half-formulated plans. He shook his head and grinned and lifted a playful finger at her.

"Now listen!" he said, as if about to tell a fairy story—which he was, in truth. "I've thought of all that. I don't blame folks for not wantin' people to come around and die in their houses. Says I to myself, 'There's just one way I can pay that good woman if the worst comes to the worst, and that's to have my will made out and leave all my property to her.' Yes, Sir, that's what I figured. Hand me that little leather-covered book off the shelf up there."

The landlady, incredulous, skeptical, and yet greedily hopeful, obeyed. He opened it and displayed long rows of figures; which were all like Greek to her, but looked important.

"Mum's the word!" he whispered, putting a finger to his lips. "I don't want all them others that comes here to be jealous of you—see? Just you forget this hospital stuff, because if I see I'm gettin' worse, I'll go anyhow. Wouldn't do anything to make you feel sad over me for anything in the world—no, sir-ee!"

She became very solicitous for his comfort, and he did not permit himself to chuckle until after she had departed.

"That'll keep her guessin' for at least two or three

days," he thought to himself, "and after that it won't matter."

An hour later his plans seemed to have received inspiration; for he slowly smiled at the broken stucco in the corner of the ceiling and murmured, "Oh, 'tain't so bad, after all. Goin' to beat the game yet!" and went serenely to sleep.

A SUSPICIOUS man might have surmised, from the influx of visitors who called on Williams within the next few days, that the news of his prospective demise had been bruited about the dressing rooms of the music halls where he, as Ramori the Great, was a familiar figure; but if the sick man had any such thoughts he carefully concealed all annoyance behind a mask of good will and carelessness. Each visitor, who talked bravely and smiled in his presence, shook a glum and sorrowful head as he or she emerged from the lodging house and thought of what Ramori had said when he expatiated on raffling his rope and meager stage outfit. "Just to leave somethin' behind that somebody may remember or use," he explained, with great regularity. "Besides, when I get ready to work again I'll want a new outfit."

No spider ever wove a web with more dexterity. He knew what they thought; namely, that the proceeds of the raffle would buy him a casket and keep him from a Potter's Field. Sometimes when alone he smiled sadly at this effort of his, and then consoled himself by saying, "It ain't as if I was beatin' 'em out of anything, after all. It's a real raffle. It ain't as if I could get out to tend to things. I'm here on my back, and just got to win the fight as best I can. I can't beg, and it's the only way I can see to get the money I've just got to have."

Perhaps it was the sheer bravery of his assertions that made the raffle the tremendous success that it was; for it swelled to ridiculous, unheard-of proportions, while he, in his dimly lighted, poorly ventilated chamber, went calmly ahead formulating his plans. Not beaten yet! Neither poverty nor illness might blanket his optimism. Quite calmly too he decided that his greatest need was a confederate who could do certain things and make certain inquiries that were highly necessary, and for another two days he studied and measured each visitor that came. It was his conclusion that most of them, through blundering kindness, would lie to a man they regarded as on his deathbed. That would not answer his purpose at all; for he must have someone who would speak the blunt truth. His mental list of eliminations led to the choice of Bill Parlow.

"He's the man," said Williams to himself. "He don't talk much; but he don't know how to lie, and I sort of believe he ain't so dumb as most folks think. I got to get him here by himself and just naturally make him do what I want done. Got to do it, that's all!"

He was like a bedridden general marshaling his forces for the battle, and serenely confident that he would win against all odds. Through the services of Mary Kelly, to whom he explained that "a feller in my fix has some things he's got to tell to just one friend," he sent for Bill. "It ain't," he said to the little dancer, "that I don't trust you, Mary; but you see you ain't a man. I got to talk to a man; so I want Bill—alone. Get me? Try to keep the others away tomorrer mornin'."

AND Big Bill Parlow, the strong man of the Peerless Parlows, appeared on time and sat on the extreme edge of a decrepit, slippery, old horsehair sofa, and twisted his hat in his hand, or ran his fingers over his cropped red head, while the invalid talked.

"Bill," he said, "I sent for you because I need someone to help me, who'll give it to me straight from the shoulder. All these others lie because they're afraid of makin' me feel bad. All of 'em think I'm goin' to croak, don't they?"

Bill's mouth hung open, and his eyes met those of the sick man as if fascinated.

"Come on! Speak out! This ain't no time to try to molly-muff feelin's," ordered the man on the bed.

"Since you want it so straight, they do," blurted the acrobat in desperation.

The sick man chuckled as if at a good joke, then lifted himself on his elbow and shook a bony finger. "Well, I ain't," he declared steadily. "And what's more, Bill, I'm goin' home. Get me? If I can get my eyes on the old girl in New York Harbor, and then last long enough to whiff the air off the Colorado hills once more, I'll live to tell you all about it when you play the Denver circuit again, Bill. It's a big job I've got before me, this thing of livin', and I've got to have a leetle bit of the right sort of help. That's why I sent for you. I ain't afraid to pass out, you know that; but I'm not ready just yet, and—by the Lord Almighty! if I do go, it will be remembered that I went fightin' fightin' to the last!"

He noted the spark of admiration that glowed in the acrobat's eyes, while he recovered breath after his vehement speech.

"A well meanin' liar can't help me, Bill. Nurses ain't no good. Kind friends are all right; but I've got

to have a man to play the game with me, and when one thing fails just shut his teeth and help me try another. You're the man, ain't you?"

The acrobat choked a little, and threatened to shove a brawny fist into the invalid's, but contented himself by saying, "To the limit, Ted."

"Then first I want you to find out how much the raffle brought in, or will bring. I want you to go to the steamship offices and find out, without lettin' 'em know more'n you have to, whether there's any chance of my gettin' aboard. Also I want a sailin' list of steamers, no matter what they say about takin' me. Now get a move, Bill, because Time's what I've got to whip most of all, and Time's my hardest fight. Also don't say nothin' to nobody."

ONCE more he was alone, retracing patterns on the soiled wall paper, and trying to find a resemblance to a new face that he had discovered on the previous day and had gloated over as being the fifth that could be distinguished. After a time, imbued with another resolution, he worked his legs over the side of the bed and went weakly through some simple gymnastic exercises, muttering to himself in time with his motion, "Got to learn to walk again, that's a cinch. It's keepin' at it that does a thing. I'll be all right pretty soon. Got to be!"

He was awake when, reluctantly, his door opened, and the acrobat entered with his pockets bulging with papers. His face, stolid usually, and immobile, betrayed bad news, and his eyes were troubled as they swept round the room.

"Don't want sick men, eh?" calmly inquired Ramori. "Well, that's all right. Don't blame 'em. Had an idea they wouldn't. I can't cross on a raft, nor swim, the way I'm feelin'; so it's got to be up to them. And I'll find a way, see if I don't!"

The spark again lighted in the acrobat's eyes. "I offered 'em any price they wanted," he said, "and told 'em they could have my last dollar; but it wouldn't go. Tried all the big companies and half a dozen little ones; but—"

"Little ones no good for me," interrupted Ramori emphatically. "Got no time to waste. Got to get across on a fast boat. I know that much. Got to see Miss Liberty as soon as possible, and after that lose not a minute gettin' out of New York."

"The raffle," said the acrobat, with a clumsy attempt at cheerfulness, "is a whirlwind. Most everybody in town seems to want that outfit of yours. Already up to two hundred dollars and—"

"Is, eh? How many chances did you take?"

The acrobat flushed and studied the crown of his hat.

"Thought you weren't goin' to lie to me!"

But Big Bill Parlow succeeded in doing it to the extent of one hundred dollars, and did it so convincingly that he left the great Ramori on the verge of tears for his fellow artists' liberality.

Out in the hallway Parlow scratched his red bristles and said to himself, "Humph! Wonder what he'll figure on next? That all the boats said they wa'n't no morgues didn't seem to faze him by a hair. When it comes to cheerfulness he makes the little god Billiken look like a first-class mourner."

WHAT Ramori did next was to work his resourceful brain until another visitor came, and this one was asked to go out and get a Bradshaw and a blank on which classified advertisements are written for the London daily newspapers. Also this visitor, departing, announced that the end was near because Ted Williams was wandering in the "noodle." But the same cheery Williams spent a pleasant evening scowling at time-tables, composing an advertisement, and if he had been gifted with more lung power might have whistled a little ragtime before going to sleep.

He was in the same cheerful mood the following morning when he handed the advertisement to the big acrobat with the request that the latter attend to its insertion; but the acrobat read through it as if bewildered.

HELP WANTED. Good, strong, able-bodied, gray-haired Irishwoman, who wants to go to America second class can have her fare paid by helping man, who is a little ill, aboard steamer. Call at eleven o'clock this morning at 7B Waldingbroke and ask for Ramori.

"But I tell you, Ted, the 'ain't no steamboat that'll let you go aboard," insisted the acrobat.

"Course they won't, if they know it! But the joke's on them because they ain't a goin' to know it," bravely retorted the sick man. "And that ain't all either. You see it's a heap harder to turn a decent woman with gray hair down than it is a man. Gray hairs and decency is a team most folks make way for."

Then, between wheezes, the optimist expounded his plan, capping his argument with an impatient sentence:

"Very well! You've got me doped out to die too. Let it go at that. S'pose I do? Then I ain't no good to anybody, am I? And it don't matter much where I'm put away, does it? If all that's true, you'll agree it's a lot better to die tryin' than to quit right here. If I win out on this scheme, I'll get aboard that boat. If I last across to old Miss Liberty, I'll be alive to land. If

I'm alive when I land, I'll last to reach the country where I was born. If I get there, I'll get well. Plain, ain't it? No argyfyin' against all that, is there?"

INUNDATED by words, the taciturn Parlow made no reply, and eventually inserted the advertisement, and reluctantly acted as reception agent for applicants the following day. He found the job almost as pleasant as being judge at a baby show; for the "able-bodied and strong" came singly, in couples, trios, and squads. They argued, wrangled, fought, and exhibited their muscles. They spoke singly, in duets, trios, and in concert at more than concert pitch, and some of the re-

jected ones volunteered to prove their strength by "licking" the strong man if he would but deign to step outside for the period of time covered by "the slight shake of a lamb's tail."

The one finally selected proved her prowess by jubilantly assisting Big Bill Parlow to throw the others out, and explained that she had learned how to do it by working against the police while in the ranks of the militant suffragettes; also that her name was Murphy, and that the Murphys could all go some when put to the test.

She was ushered in to meet her new employer, who grinned amiably, as if the preceding noise and tumult

had met with his approval. He took a look at her plain, homely, round face as she stood with arms akimbo, then at her gray hair, her broad shoulders and hips, and at her big splay feet, and gave a sigh of great satisfaction.

"Perfect!" said Ramori the Great. "Couldn't have made her to order any better. She's cast for the part right now. Not a gink in the world would accuse me of kidnappin' her, or lurin' her from her innercent home. Might think I was contractin' for her to run a sawmill, or a steam roller, or somethin' like that."

"I've a brother Mike who do be runnin' wan in Amer-

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GETTING A JOLT FROM WESTY

Drawings by F. Foster Lincoln

By SEWELL FORD

YOU might call it time out, or suspended hostilities durin' peace negotiations, or anything like that. Anyway, Auntie has softened up to the extent of lettin' me come around once a week without makin' me assume a disguise, or crawl in through the coal chute. Course I'm still under suspicion; but while the ban ain't lifted complete she don't treat me quite so much like a porch climber or a free speech agitator.

"Remember," says she, "Friday evenings only, from half after eight until not later than ten."

"Yes'm," says I, "and it's mighty—"

"Please!" she breaks in. "No grotesquely phrased effusions of gratitude. I am merely indulging Verona in one of her absurd whims. You understand that, I trust?"

"I get your idea," says I, "and even if it don't swell my chest any, I'm—"

"Kindly refrain from using such patois," says Auntie.

"Eh?" says I. "You mean ditch the gabby talk? All right, Ma'am."

Auntie rolls her eyes and sighs hopeless. "How my niece can find entertainment in such—" Here Auntie stops and shrugs her shoulders. "Well," she goes on, "it is a mystery to me."

"Me too," says I; "so for once we're playin' on the same side of the net, ain't we? Say, but she's some girl though!"

Auntie's mouth corners wrinkle into one of them sarcastic smiles that's her specialty, and she remarks careless, "Quite a number of young men seem to have discovered that Verona is rather attractive."

"They'd have to be blind in both eyes and born without ears if they didn't," says I, "believe me!"

Oh, yes, we had a nice confidential little chat, me and Auntie did,—almost chummy, you know,—and as it breaks up and I backs out into the hall, givin' her the polite "Good evenin', Ma'am," I thought I heard a half smothered snicker behind the draperies. Maybe it was that flossy French maid of theirs. But I floats downtown as gay and chirky as though I'd been promoted to first vice president of something.

Course I was wise to the fact that Auntie wa'n't arrangin' any duo act with the lights shaded soft. Not her! Even if I had an official ratin' in the Corrugated now, and a few weeks back had shunted her off from a losin' stock deal, she wa'n't tryin' to decoy me into the fam'ly. Hardly! I could guess how she'd set the stage for my weekly call, and if I found myself with anything more than a walk-on part in a mob scene I'd be lucky.

YOU know she's taken a house for the winter, one of them old-fashioned brownstone fronts up on Madison avenue that some friends of hers was goin' to close durin' a tour abroad. Nothin' swell, but real comfy and substantial, and as I marches up bold for my first push at the bell button I'm kind of relieved that I don't have to stand in line.

Who should I get a glimpse of, though, as I'm handin' my things to the butler, but the favored candidate, Sappy Westlake? Yep, big as life, with his slick, pale hair, his long legs, and his woodeny face! Looked like his admission card must have been punched for eight P.M., or else he'd been asked for dinner. Anyway, he was right on the ground, thumpin' out a new rag on the piano, and enjoyin' the full glare of the limelight. The only other entry I can discover is a girl.

"My friend Miss Ull," explains Vee.

A good deal of a queen Miss Ull is too, tall and slim and tinted up delicate, but one of these poutin', peevish beauts that can look you over cold and distant and say "Howdy do" in such a bored, tired tone that you feel like apologizin' for the intrusion.

They didn't get wildly enthusiastic over my entrance, Miss Ull and Westy. In fact, almost before the honors are done they turns their backs on me and drifts to the piano once more.

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"Do play that 'Try-trimmer-Träumerei' thing again," urges Miss Ull, and begins to hum it as Westy proceeds to bang it out.

But there's Vee, her wheat-colored hair fluffin' about her seashell ears and her big gray eyes watchin' me sort of quizzin' and impish. "Well, Mr. Private Secretary?" says she.

"When does the rest of the chorus come on?" says I.

"The what?" says Vee.

"The full panel," says I. "Auntie's planned to have the S. R. O. sign out on my evenin's, ain't she?"

At which Vee tosses her head. "How silly!" says she. "No one else is expected that I know of. Why?"

"Oh, she might think we'd be lonesome," says I. "Honest, I was lookin' for a bunch; but if it's only a mixed foursome, that ain't so bad. I got the scheme, though. She counts Westy as better than a crowd. 'Safety First' is her motto. But who's the Peevish Priscilla here, that's so tickled to see me come in she has to turn away to hide her emotion?"

"Doris?" says Vee. "Oh, we got to know her on the steamer coming back from the Mediterranean last winter. Stunning, isn't she?"

"Specially her manners," says I. "Almost paralyzin'."



"We wa'n't lookin' for what come next, either of us."

"Oh, that's just her way," says Vee. "Really, she's very nice when you get to know her. I'm rather sorry for her too. Her home life is—well, not at all congenial. That's one reason why I asked her to visit me for a week or so."

"That's the easiest thing you do, ain't it," says I, "bein' nice to folks that ain't used to it?"

"Thank goodness," says Vee, "someone has discovered my angelic qualities at last! Go on, Torchy, think of some more, can't you?" And she claps her hands enthusiastic.

"Quit your spoofin'," says I, "or I'll ring for Auntie and tell how you've been kiddin' the guest of honor. I might talk easier too if we could adjourn to the window alcove over there. No rule against that, is there?"

Didn't seem to be. And we'd have had a perfectly good chat if it hadn't been for Doris. Such a restless

young female! First she wants to drum something out on the piano herself. Then she must have Vee come show her how it ought to go. Next she wants to practise a new fancy dance, and so on. She keeps Westy trottin' around, and Vee comin' and goin', and things stirred up gen'rally. One minute she's gigglin' hysterical over nothin' at all, and the next she's poutin' sulky.

Anyway, she managed to queer the best part of the evenin', and I'd just settled down with Vee in a corner when the big hall clock starts to chime ten, and in through the draperies marches Auntie. It ain't any accidental droppin' in either. She glances at me stern and suggestive and nods towards the door. So it was all over!

"Say," I whispers to Vee as I does a draggy exit, "if Doris is to be with us again, would you mind my bringin' a clothesline and ropin' her to the piano?"

MAYBE it wa'n't some discouragin' a week later to find the same pair still on the job, with Doris as much of a peace disturber as ever. I got a little more of her history sketched out by Vee that night. Seems that Doris didn't really belong, for all her airs. Her folks had only lived up in the West 70's for four or five years, and before that—

"Well, you know," says Vee, archin' her eyebrows expressive, "on the East Side somewhere."

You see, Father had been comin' strong in business of late,—antiques and house decoratin'. I remember havin' seen the name over the door of his big Fifth avenue shop,—Leo Ull. You know there's about five hundred per cent. profit in that game when you get it goin'. And while Pa Ull might have started small, in an East 14th street basement, with livin' rooms in the rear, he kept branchin' out,—gettin' to Fourth avenue, and fin'ly to Fifth, jumpin' from a flat to an apartment, and from that to a reg'lar house.

So the two boys went to college, and later on little Doris, with long braids down her back and weeps in her eyes, is sent off to a girls' boardin' school. By the time her turn came too the annual income was runnin' into six figures. Besides, Doris is the pet. And when Pa

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THE OPTIMIST

Continued from page 5

icy now," said Mrs. Murphy, evincing great interest; "but about runnin' wan meself—"

Ramori explained that all he wished of her was to act as nurse for him and help him get aboard the steamer, incidentally explaining also that the lords of the ferries had flatly refused to carry him. Instantly she shook her head and told him she wasn't the kind of a lady to beat the steamships out of a passage. She had never been in jail; although she would admit that now and then a Murphy had so landed, but always for a gentleman's offense of beating heads instead of transportation companies. The sick man argued persuasively; but she, being a "dacent, clane, law-abidin' widdie," was obdurate. For but a minute or two Ramori's optimism wavered; then, undaunted, he returned to the attack.

"Too bad! Too bad!" he murmured, as if to himself. "It's not really breakin' any laws. It does no harm to anyone but the bunch of Orangemen that run that steamer and—"

"What's that?" demanded the widow, interested. "Say it again, Mister!"

Painstakingly the fertile Ramori laid stress on the harmlessness of worsting an Orangeman.

The widow took off her hat, thrust a few disarranged hairpins home, and said with great resolution, "I'm wid yez! Whin do we be after startin' for Liverpool?"

To the unqualified astonishment of both Mrs. Murphy and Bill Parlow, Ramori said, with a broad grin, "We don't start from there at all. We start from Queenstown, Ireland."

He was as pleased as a boy at the acrobat's open-mouthed amazement, and added brokenly, as fast as his breath would permit, "You see it's this way. They would nail me if I tried to go aboard at either Liverpool or Southampton. I can't take chances of losing any time in that way. If I go slowly to Queenstown, I'll get a full day or two of rest before I have to sail. Westbound ships put in there for mail, if the weather ain't too rough. They're always in a hurry. There's always a rush and bustle. I've watched 'em lots of times. They ain't got time to pay a lot of attention to every person that comes aboard, and I'll scrape through unless the ship's doctor's got eyes like an eagle. Mrs. Murphy's my interference, as they say in football. Can't tell exactly how it'll all work till we get up against it; but there's always a way opens up for a man who's game clean through to the last breath. That's me, Mrs. Murphy!"

BUT one day later, despite the angry protests of the landlady, who wanted to know about "that there will," the strong man carried the optimist down to a taxicab as if he were a child in weight, and supported him to the railway station. The optimist's parting words to the acrobat, after the latter had laid him out along one side of a compartment on the Irish Mail, were to "keep it quiet, Bill, as long as you can. Folks that's been so kind will blame you for lettin' me go if anything does happen. Maybe some of 'em'll be a little disappointed. I've noticed there's a heap of folks, particularly women, has a sneakin' fondness for funerals; but the 'ain't goin' to be no funeral, and they'll feel all right when they get my cablegram that I'll send to you. Nothin' like never givin' up, Pal. Them that tries, always does! That's my motto. So long, Bill."

There was not a quiver in his voice, nor a tremor of an eye muscle, as he bade Bill Parlow goodbye, and all the latter could say, as the train pulled out, was:

"Well, I'll be teetotally, good gol-darned!"

It was Mrs. Murphy, worried, but competent, who hustled porters about and had him carried aboard the channel boat, where it seemed that even his iron nerve would at last prove unequal to his self-set task. He was too weak to speak; but whenever he opened his eyes there was the same smiling, fighting, light that refused to be quenched. By the time they boarded the train for Queenstown the widow idolized him; for in him, skeleton in body and giant in heart, was a flame of courage, flickering, but still alive, that commanded her admiration. At Queenstown she lied for him from her own resources; for he was too weak to interfere. This, said she to the curious, was her cousin: not ill, but a trifle indisposed.

"He's from me father's side of the house, a Kildare, an' thim Kildares, f'r the life o' thim, could niver stand railway thrains. It's clane used up me cousin is, from the devilish shakin' on the way here. Him sick? He could whop the biggest man in Queens-town if he heard annywan sayin' it of him!"

And while she bought one first-class and one second-class ticket from the steamship agent in Queenstown, the "slightly indisposed" Ramori lay in his hotel, gasping as does a dying fish for air, motionless, supine, threatening each moment to make the brave project of recovery a dream.

"Just to see the old girl standing there at the head of the bay once more," he whispered faintly over and over as if to fortify his strained courage, and by shutting his eyes he could fancy the lift of her torch, the smell of the earth after the voyage, the distant hum of the land that he claimed as his own, which he hungered for as for his own, and in whose healing he believed as he did in God Almighty. The breath of the sea air for forty-eight hours, as he waited, seemed like wine to his broken lungs; but the barometer troubled him, and the widow, tired of trotting below to consult it, finally purloined it and hung it on the foot of his bed. It fascinated him, it tormented him. Once, fantastically, it drove him to despair.

"If it's too rough," he muttered wearily, when it crawled to "Change," "the boat won't put in. And I ain't exactly admittin' it, but a week might whip me."

He got his thin, white fingers together on the counterpane, closed his eyes, and prayed as best he knew how:

"Lord, make it smooth—just for me. Can't you see I ain't givin' up, and am doin' my best? I'm most at the end of my string, Big Friend, and if you don't make it smooth tomorrow, I'm afraid I'll be mighty discouraged, and I'll have hard work to ever get home again. You've stopped the waves before, and I'm prayin' you to do it again, just to help a poor, tough-luck cuss like me from losin' his biggest fight!"

And thus he prayed and gathered strength, this man who refused to surrender and die.

"I've got that interference ye tried to explain to me fixed up," announced a triumphant, hearty voice as the door opened, and the widow Murphy appeared by his bedside. "I met a man I knew in Dublin be the name of Hogan. Hogan's goin' to walk ahead of yez. He hands out his ticket; thin, just as you've handed yours, Hogan turns back, and says he, 'Don't I get a receipt, Mister?' That sta-arts an argyment, and while it's on ye moves aboard. 'There goes me Cousin,' says I to the officer, and 'Phwat for do you be after palaverin' so much?' to Hogan. And bechune us we makes so much of a ruction that yez will be out of the way before we're done."

She said more, much more, being proud of her conspiracy, but discovered at the end of fifteen minutes that her charge was peacefully sleeping.

HIS sleep was scarcely less peaceful than the sleep of the sea when, clinging to the widow's arm on one side, and the merciful Hogan's on the other, he boarded the mail tender the next morning. It seemed to him that it had taken almost his last ounce of strength to descend from the cab on the pier and walk such a short distance; but now he sat on the bench on the upper deck and watched the land slip backward. The white old watch towers looked down from above, and he whispered to himself, "Got to be just like them—front face, no shakin', no flinchin'. It's your life you're gamblin' for today, Teddy. Play the man! Don't give in!"

Anxiously he looked upward at the lofty rail of the liner and at the open port door into which men were swinging the gangplank. Already the mails were shooting upward in frantic haste, and venders of lace, blackthorns, carved gewgaws, and pipes were scurrying aboard the great ship to sell their wares to those who wanted a souvenir, or what they conceived to be a bargain. Here and there a homesick emigrant shouted a parting word. Excited persons pushed to and fro. The rail above was lined with faces and shoulders as the passengers from Liverpool leaned over to stare at the scene below.

Everyone on the tender seemed intent on being the first to board the outgoing ship, and for a moment Ramori debated whether his strength in this last rally was equal to being pushed and jammed from behind and ahead. Was it not better to wait until the crowd thinned out? No, he decided, that would scarcely do, because coming singly he must necessarily invite closer inspection. Hogan, the sympathetic, helped him to solve the question, by holding a newspaper in front of his face and thrusting a pocket flask against his lips.

"Now for it, me la-ad!" he muttered. "Take a big shwig, grit the teeth of yez—and oop we air!"

With his last possible strength, desper-

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ately intent on walking up that gangplank like a well man, his jaws set until the muscles bunched under his shrunken cheeks, Ramori got to his feet. Already Hogan had muttered a profane and fine oath of encouragement and admiration; already the widow was behind him.

"Keep close to me," Ramori said to her; "but put no hand out unless you see me fall. Got to walk aboard alone, because that man at the top, the one with the beard, is the ship's doctor. The minute I'm past him pay no more attention to me. Go below to the second class and stay there, because—because I'll be all right!"

It was almost like an afterthought when they were started on their formidable journey that he turned and looked at her with gentle eyes and said, "And in case I don't see you again, God bless you!"

HE looked away when he saw that her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and he tried not to hear her prayers as he tottered slowly upward, clutching the rails on both sides so tightly that the bones showed white through his bloodless skin, and by sheer mental effort driving his trembling knees to their task.

His head roared with giddiness and he fixed his eyes on the center of Hogan's broad back to make certain that something in his world was secure. It seemed to him that the gangplank beneath his feet was reeling and twisting, the great ship swaying dizzily to and fro, and the lighter behind leaping like a cork. Once he thought he must fall, and fought a wild desire to throw himself to his knees for a rest and recovery. The still sea was to him in a tempest, and the fleckless sky whirling and doubling as if storm tossed. He fell to counting his steps, "One, two, three—"

Would that interminable journey never end? Ah, here he was at the head! There stood the doctor! Now or never! This the end of the gantlet! He dared to release his handholds and stand erect. He succeeded in passing out his ticket, standing while the doctor began examining it, and then Hogan came shoving back with questions, and the doctor impatiently passed the sick man that he might rid himself of this big Irish pest. The widow raised a loud, protesting voice, much to the amusement of all within hearing. A bit of repartee brought a laugh; but under cover of this timely diversion no one heeded a bent, staggering figure that desperately made its way along the rail by the cabins, clinging hand over hand, fighting every inch of the way, and intent only on escaping from sight. A stateroom door stood open; but piled on the berth was baggage. He slid farther along the white wall, still dreading a collapse, until he came in contact with a brass handle to which he clung, which was to him as a beacon to a storm-tossed mariner. He clutched it desperately, twisted it in frantic haste, swung open a stateroom door, and looked inside. It was empty. He swung blindly to the door, got across that formidable brass threshold, pulled the door shut after him, gathered himself for the greatest effort of all, swayed across the narrow cabin, which had suddenly become dark and unreal, and pitched forward into a berth, crumpled, unconscious, and with a thin spray of red flecking his lips.

DEAD OR ALIVE

nesses? They're both old graybeards with a kind of honest look about 'em."

"They'll do."

"Do we have to be sworn in?" spoke up Cate suspiciously.

"Yes."

"Then I'll be damned if I do it!" he announced flatly. "I don't like this messin' with the law nohow. I knowed a feller once that made oath to some piddlin' thing that another feller had did,—forget what just now,—and I'll be dod-rotted if they didn't send him to jail for it. I'll stay outside and watch the hosses and let somebody else be sworn in."

Charlie Enders' "epizudick" again assailed him in aggravated form. Rat roundly cursed his uncle for his cowardice. But Cate remained obdurate, and Selim Shuckspare was finally persuaded to serve in his stead.

FOUR of the clan unloaded the precious box and hoisted it to their shoulders, and the procession passed up the flagged walk, followed by a score of spectators. At the big carved doors of the building a momentary confusion was caused by Enders' request that all weapons be deposited outside. Then the line entered a corridor that was damp and chill by contrast with the bright sun-

It seemed but a moment later that he was aroused by the sounds of voices and the flaring of a light. It took him a long time to reorganize and collect his faculties, and even his indomitable will was broken by the fear that they had discovered and were about to send him back to land, rejected; but slowly he became aware of a muffled, regular, throbbing sound, and he looked at the curtains, his heart leaping exultantly as he recognized that nothing save a deep sea swell could thus sway them. That man with the beard—who was he? Oh, yes, the ship's doctor. And that voluble woman behind him, who, with arms familiarly akimbo, declared that her cousin was far from being a sick man, but that "Thim Kildares niver could stand travelin'?" Oh, yes, the widow, faithful, alarmed, who had doubtless instigated the search and was now bending over and calling on the saints to preserve and protect so brave a gentleman! Ramori looked weakly up at the doctor, who had to lean far forward to hear his words, and gave the signal of his unquenchable spirit.

"They said I couldn't come," he whispered; "but I did. And here I am! Too late to turn me back. I'm goin' to see the big lady that stands at the foot of the bay. Then I'm goin'—goin' to smell the wind that comes clean off the big Rockies and up through the sagebrush." He twisted his head and said, "Gosh! but this is growin' weather for corn! That forty— No man's ever whipped till he gives up. I'm goin' to win yet, I am!"

And so his whisper trailed on, and his feverish eyes, unquenched, valiant, rested on the surgeon, who shook his head doubtfully, then turned to Mrs. Murphy with a puzzled question.

"What I want to know," snapped the doctor, "is how the deuce he ever got here?"

And the widow, on being assured that it was too late to put her charge off the ship, confessed to the conspiracy, while the surgeon repeated over and over, "Grit! Sheer grit! Maybe he will live. Hard to kill fellows like that."

THERE is a beacon held aloft in New York Harbor, a colossal statue of hope for those who understand it. There is a ship's crew, still sailing the seas, who still speak at intervals of the fight made by the optimist, who has, somehow, become for them an example for those who waver weak heartedly. They tell the story to the discouraged as proof that all things, even Death, must yield to those who do not capitulate. A prosperous old Irishwoman who runs a boarding house at Atlantic City, never tires of recounting the tale, and Bill Parlow, dumb in words, but faithful in friendship, hangs every night on his dressing room wall as a mascot a message received some years ago that reads:

I've won out. Thank them all for me, and don't ever forget that it's them that tries that does.

But last of all does Ted Williams, forgotten as Ramori the Great, appreciate that of such humble stuff as he is made the beacon of life to lend hope and courage to those who, distressed, sometimes falter when the way ahead appears dark, and perilous, and blind!

shine outside, climbed a winding flight of stairs, and filed down an aisle to the rostrum at the far end of the room.

"Seems as though we ought to have a preacher," suggested George Oakes solemnly.

A titter rippled over the crowd; but Rat wheeled nervously. "Do the law require it?"

"No; but it would seem more Christian-like."

"He war prayed over quite a spell last night," remarked Ariel Thistlewood. "Seems as though he wouldn't need no more so soon."

"And by a man who knows how to pray too," added Rat.

"Let it go then," said the Sheriff. "Open the coffin!"

The opening was a tedious task, with only a stove poker and an old window weight for tools, and the sweat was dripping from Rat's chin before it was finished. Finally, though, with a desperate wrench, he tore the lid off with a sound of splintering wood.

At the sight presented to his view Rat's eyes glazed with vacancy and his jaw dropped like a broken spring. In place of Laban's head there lay a grinning jack-o'-lantern, fashioned from a pumpkin, and the body space was occupied by several lengths



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of bar iron of approximately the weight of a man.

A broadside of laughter from the spectators, already primed for the joke, shook the room. But above the laughter rang out a loud and resonant oath from Rat as he danced in an ecstasy of fury.

"I know who done it!" he shrieked. "It was that blasted, hook-nosed old Popsy Flitt—him and that wench of a Latchiepell! They done it—after I trusted 'em—after I let 'em in to hold a sarvice over him! And now my thousand dollars are gone!" Tears filled his eyes.

"Come with me," said the Sheriff in an undertone.

He led Rat into the Judge's chamber, a high-ceiled, gloomy room, with massive, Flemish oak table and chairs, and more books than the mountaineer had ever seen in all his life before.

"Rat," said the irrepressible joker, "Rowan and Chantry Flitt told me a strange thing this morning. They told me that their grandfather raised Laban Pentecost from the dead last night."

Rat's face froze in terror; but he faltered out, "A likely lie!"

"Only," added Enders, "either Labe or Labe's ghost was with them. He came down to give himself up. Judge Goodman, after hearing his story, felt sure he would appear for trial, and released him on his own recognizance. I think—" he paused and stepped over to a window. "Yes, they are down there yet. Take a look for yourself."

Rat advanced reluctantly, crossing the thick, noiseless rug with the gingerly tread of a cat in wet grass. He looked down. On the sward below, in a spot secluded by a brick wall, where the Sheriff had placed them in order to avoid possible trouble, sat the Flitt boys and Laban Pentecost, playing mumble-the-peg with a jackknife.

Rat turned to the Sheriff a face on which superstition and commonsense strove for mastery. "That's Labe—or his ghost," said he huskily. "But I don't see no bullet mark on his forehead."

"Mightn't that mark have been made by a pokeberry?" asked Enders with an enlightening twinkle. "Mightn't your shot have failed to kill Labe? And mightn't he and the Flitts have put up a game on you?"

The truth percolated slowly through Rat's mind. "More'n likely," he admitted, with a flush of shame. But a moment later he added with an illuminated face, "Sheriff, I ain't sorry. Me and Labe had no fuss. Since I kilt him—or thought I had—I ain't slept well. I'd sooner see him alive down thar than have that thousand dollars."

"Shake!" said Enders.

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